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Ballots and Bullets: The Bloody County Seat Wars of Kansas

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but was nonetheless palpable and based on firm convictions by those who rejected the use of force in compelling the southern states to remain within the Union.

Jennifer L. Weber's *Copperheads* is a welcome addition to the literature on the Copperheads. The book speaks directly, and at times eloquently, to the complexities of the war within the war—the opposition and dissension that in January 1863 Lincoln called “the fire in the rear.” Weber, assistant professor of history at the University of Kansas and a former journalist, researched and wrote her 2003 doctoral dissertation at Princeton University under the direction of James M. McPherson. *Copperheads*, an extension of that work, is the most important book on the subject to appear since the work of the late Frank L. Klement, whose thesis Weber revises in important ways. In *The Copperheads in the Middle West* (1960), *Dark Lanterns: Secret Political Societies, Conspiracies, and Treason Trials in the Civil War* (1984), and *Lincoln's Critics: The Copperheads of the North* (1999), Klement argued that fears about Copperhead sympathies and activities undermining the war effort were greatly exaggerated by Republican editors, who exploited those anxieties as a means of rallying support for the Lincoln administration and vilifying Peace Democrats. Joel H. Silbey adopts a similar view in *A Respectable Minority: The Democratic Party in the Civil War Era, 1860–1868* (1977). Weber does not dispute the contention of Klement and Silbey that concerns over so-called Copperhead conspiracies were greatly exaggerated, but she does reject the idea that Lincoln's concern over “the fire in the rear” was in anyway misplaced. The Copperheads may not have been a self-conscious and organized fifth column in the North, but the opposition of the Peace Democrats nonetheless presented a clear and present danger to the Union cause. Weber advances her revisionist thesis in convincing detail.

Ballots and Bullets: The Bloody County Seat Wars of Kansas, by Robert K. DeArment. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006. xi, 272 pp. Illustrations, map, notes, bibliography, index. \$29.95 cloth.

Reviewer John von Tersch is a lecturer in history at the University of Northern Iowa. He wrote a master's research paper at the University of Northern Iowa on Iowa's county seat wars.

County seat wars have been an intriguing phenomenon on the American frontier. Winning county seat recognition could help ensure the long-term success of a newly established community during a time of economic and social uncertainty. There is evidence of county seat wars in the East, but the vast majority took place in the Midwest and Great

Plains as town promoters and boosters used a variety of strategies to secure the county seat prize for their communities.

In *Ballots and Bullets: The Bloody County Seat Wars of Kansas*, Robert DeArment focuses his attention on Kansas and the violence and bloodshed associated with county seat wars in the southwestern portion of the state. DeArment, who has written numerous works on the Old West, including a biography of Bat Masterson and another on little-known western gunfighters, is at home writing about hot-tempered emotion and gunplay in the high-stakes battles for county seat recognition in Gray, Wichita, Stevens, and Seward counties. His work details deadly encounters on dusty Kansas main streets, the Hay Meadow Massacre, the bloody confrontation in Big Canyon, and the ambush in that territory known as No Man's Land on the Kansas-Texas frontier.

DeArment finds that colorful gunslingers often played significant roles in these county seat battles. Many, such as Masterson, entered into county seat conflicts as hired guns, bringing with them well-established reputations for quick, decisive action from behind a revolver. Two came from Iowa—the peace-loving Bill Tilghman, born in Fort Dodge, Iowa, who made a name for himself as the cool and resourceful town marshal in frontier Dodge City, and Neal Brown, Tilghman's close friend, who served as assistant town marshal of Dodge under Jim Masterson, Bat's brother.

DeArment uses mercenary gunslingers as a backdrop as he concentrates on highly charged local personalities such as Asa Soule, W. D. Brainerd, Sam Wood, and Sam Robinson. He asserts that these greedy townsite promoters stood to make enormous profits with the successful development of new communities on the mercurial Kansas frontier, so they often turned to hired guns to help them win county seat recognition and thereby secure their investments. DeArment also finds that their avarice was frequently fueled by the vitriolic words of local newspaper editors. His list of primary sources includes newspaper accounts and editorials by frontier Kansas editors who used their presses to trumpet the praises of their home communities and patrons while reviling potential county seat rivals.

County seat wars in Iowa often employed the same unsavory legal maneuvers, fraudulent election tactics, and dubious schemes to attract railroads to prospective county seat communities as found in southwestern Kansas, but county seat designation in the Hawkeye State was relatively more peaceful and restrained. Stable land prices, adequate rainfall amounts, and orderly settlement patterns enabled Iowa to avert fatal county seat confrontations such as those on the

wind-swept plains of southwestern Kansas. Armed conflict, when it did take place, was not characterized by Winchester rifles or deadly ambushes, but by the throwing of rotten eggs and vegetables, as evidenced in the county seat wars of Black Hawk and Marshall counties.

Historians investigating county seat wars in Iowa might consider the role played by frontier newspaper editors, whose investment in their fledgling communities was understandably strong. James Schellenberg has called such early town-site pioneers “inveterate booster[s] of everything local.” It was to their advantage to partner with town promoters in the push for county seat recognition. The editors bet that winning the county seat would result in raised status for their frontier community, along with a larger population, more local businesses, and an increase in subscriptions and advertising revenue—all helping to guarantee the survival of their presses. State law requiring the publication of county legal proceedings and court records on a regular basis in the county seat newspaper also meant a steady and reliable source of income for any county seat editor.

In Iowa, at least, the printed word, which in many cases evolved into bombastic editorial rhetoric boasting the advantages of one prospective county seat community over a rival, was far more prevalent than the deadly western six-shooter. Evidence of this can be found in the heated county seat battles waged in Clayton, Mitchell, Marshall, and O’Brien counties, to name a few. The treasure of Iowa frontier newspapers on microfilm and microfiche in state and local libraries is a boon to any researcher seeking to know more.

900 Miles from Nowhere: Voices from the Homestead Frontier, by Steven R. Kinsella. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2006. xi, 216 pp. Illustrations, map, notes, lists of sources of letters, diaries, and photographs. \$29.95 cloth.

Reviewer Lori Ann Lahlum is assistant professor of history at Minnesota State University, Mankato. Her research and writing have focused on Norwegian women on the northern prairies and plains.

In *900 Miles from Nowhere: Voices from the Homestead Frontier*, Steven Kinsella uses letters, diary excerpts, and photographs to highlight non-Indian settler experiences on the Great Plains from roughly 1850 to 1920. Kinsella seeks to give “voice” to men, women, and children who moved into the region and wrestled with the landscape as they “settled in search of the personal and economic freedom represented by land ownership” (3). Kinsella sees a direct link between settlers’ experiences and the region today. He views the “independence” of